

The principle of
Transnational and Interregional Cooperation
in the new ESF programmes (2007-2013)

A framework for programming



*Report by an ad hoc working group of Member States
on Transnational and Interregional Cooperation*

**EQUAL Managing Authorities of
Belgium (NI), Czech Republic, Finland, Italy, Poland, Spain, Sweden and United Kingdom (GB)**

June 2006

Preamble

During the period 2007-2013, the European Social Fund (ESF) will support transnational and inter-regional actions across all Member States. Member States, as part of their programming exercise, will establish why, what, how and when a transnational and inter-regional dimension is incorporated in the approach and design, implementation structures and procedures, and monitoring and evaluation systems of ESF Operational Programmes.

Recognising the benefits of learning from one another, government officials involved in the management of the EQUAL Community Initiative and in the planning of the 2007-2013 ESF programmes agreed to set up, in July 2005, a **Working Group of Member States on transnational and inter-regional co-operation**. This Working Group provided a platform for Member States to share the lessons learnt in the current period, particularly under EQUAL, as well as to exchange ideas and plans on best ways to use the ESF to benefit from transnational cooperation and for learning from one another.

This paper is the result of the work of this Working Group which included representatives from Dutch speaking Belgium, Czech Republic, Finland, Italy, Poland, Spain, Sweden and Great Britain (*See Annex 6*). A summary of its conclusions was presented to the ESF Committee meeting in Brussels on 23 September 2005 and has been further augmented and substantiated following a seminar involving more than 100 representatives from all Member States on 8 December 2005.

Status and purpose of this report

The purpose of this report is to support Member States in the programming of provisions to support transnational and interregional co-operation in ESF programmes, and to show how added-value can be maximised. It reflects experience of past and present ESF interventions, which strongly supports the view that a transnational dimension adds value to results.

The report presents good practices and lessons learnt in promoting transnational cooperation and provides practical conclusions for Member States. It is based on a critical review of the experiences made in managing the EQUAL programmes, and **reflects the experience and opinion of this working group**.

- The **first part** of the document focuses on the relevance of transnational and inter-regional cooperation and on the advantage to be gained from its integration into ESF programmes. This part may be of particular interest to the **decision-makers responsible** in the Member States **for the strategy and priorities of the ESF** and their consistency with the reformed Lisbon process and the priorities of the Community Strategic Guidelines for Cohesion.
- The **second part** seeks to address the needs of those whose task it is to **draw up the programming documents** and then to ensure good governance of the programmes in terms of implementation, monitoring and evaluation. This part identifies implementation options at Operational Programme level, and highlights implementing provisions critical for success.
- **Annex 1** summarises, in form of **checklists**, how to assess that transnational and interregional cooperation has been integrated into a new ESF programme. Three checklists are provided: the first on ex-ante evaluation, the second for the National Strategic Reference Framework, and the third for Operational Programmes.
- Annexes 2-5 present short **examples of different types and level of transnational and inter-regional cooperation**.
- Annex 6 describes the work of the working group that drafted this note.

Rationale for action– The bigger picture.

Collaboration beyond established borders, be they organisational, national or regional, has been a way to get access to information and new ideas, to stimulate and support innovation, and to acquire skills and means to improve delivery for several centuries. It has been used as a way to foster a learning process that takes into account more perspectives than the obvious or already familiar and thereby contributing to furthering results beyond what was possible to foresee. In the context of public policy, **learning from the experience in other countries or regions in an organised way, exchanging ideas, knowledge, know-how, and staff, and joint development, implementation, staffing and financing of operations where an added value can be expected** are simply tools for good governance. In this context, benchmarking and peer reviews are examples of instruments to achieve learning to improve operations, and when these tools are used beyond national borders even more added value is created.

An example of this dynamic is the open method of coordination that compares and shares between Member States performance measured against common criteria and objectives whilst allowing for different strategies and ways to reach them. That is why the **European Social Fund (ESF)**, the financial arm for realising the agreed objectives of the revised Lisbon Strategy and the Community Cohesion Guidelines in the area of employment, *promotes transnational and interregional cooperation.*

Integrating a transnational and interregional dimension to national or regional initiatives also contributes to the strategy of building Europe from the ground along with other initiatives like exchange of trainers, staff or students. It supports the creation of an EU identity in addition to the regional or national ones. Many of the reforms of structures and processes that are required in Europe (as identified in the Lisbon agenda for example) are challenging; therefore support from all stakeholders and societal groups concerned needs to be mobilised. Sharing a common base for the European perspective is vital to generate this support.

Although trans-national cooperation is not always easy, it can often be the most effective way of achieving results. This is because trans-national cooperation provides a tool for lateral thinking needed to innovate. As an incentive, and recognising the additional cost and time associated with transnational cooperation, the ESF Regulation makes such cooperation **more attractive** by raising the **level of co-financing by 10%** for support organised under a dedicated priority axis or Operational Programme. In order to add value to the ESF, transnational and interregional actions need to be done in a systematic and efficient way. It is important to underline that the trans-national dimension in the new ESF OPs should not simply be established as “an optional extra” for a few actors.

The scope for trans-national co-operation in the new ESF programmes will be broader than in the current period under EQUAL. This will allow for greater sharing of experience and expertise between a broad range of actors including public authorities, social partners, organisations from the civil society and other interested initiatives and networks.

Relevance for the ESF

The role of the ESF is not only to support actions related to:

- ↪ increasing the adaptability of workers and firms, enterprises and entrepreneurs
- ↪ enhancing access to employment and sustainability
- ↪ reinforcing the social inclusion of people at a disadvantage
- ↪ enhancing, expanding and improving investment in human capital
- ↪ strengthening institutional capacity at national, regional and local level

but also to **mobilise for reforms in the fields of employment and inclusion** by underpinning the reform processes at national, regional and local level linked to the Lisbon agenda.

This particular function of the ESF requires that the dynamic of transnational and interregional cooperation is also used in future ESF implementation through the sharing of information, experiences, results and good practices and through developing complementary approaches and coordinated or joint action.

To simplify matters, in the context of this note, the notion of "transnational cooperation" also covers "interregional cooperation".

In the framework of the ESF 2007-2013, cooperation between Member States and regions refers to **operations aiming at sharing information, experiences, results and good practices, or at developing complementary approaches or joint action.**

The responsibility for implementing transnational and interregional cooperation will fall primarily on the Member States, with the Commission offering support and assistance through a range of direct and indirect support.

On the basis of these reflections, this paper sets out the options for integrating transnational and interregional elements in the ESF programmes 2007-2013, and examines their implications.

The following sections of the paper look at four key sets of issues:

- **WHY - Transnational co-operation - value-added and comparative advantages from experience in current programmes** resulting from transnational cooperation between projects, bilateral partnerships between national authorities, regional networks, and thematic networks in past programmes, drawing directly from experience in EQUAL, and **the potential advantages** of transnational co-operation;
- **WHAT** - Possible **types of transnational co-operation** that could be supported by the ESF;
- **HOW**- the options for **implementation at programme level** – an examination of three potential models of transnational co-operation: a dedicated transnational priority; transnational cooperation as a cross-cutting requirement in all priorities; and a combination of these two;
- **WHO** and **WHEN** - the implications for implementation and management at Member State and EU levels, indicating the resources and assistance that the Commission and the Member States will need to commit to ensure the success of whatever model or models are adopted.

1. Transnational co-operation - value-added and comparative advantages from experience in current programmes (WHY?)

Experience in the administration of the EQUAL Initiative (building on the prior experiences of ADAPT and EMPLOYMENT) has confirmed the real and growing value of the following aspects of transnational co-operation.

- **Evaluations and case studies have underlined the effectiveness of transnational co-operation between innovative projects.** A recent survey¹ identified the key benefits of comparing and learning from experiences across Member States, both at programme and at project level:
 - better understanding of different national legal and institutional contexts, relevant EU developments and increased awareness of the discrimination faced by disadvantaged groups (e.g. asylum seekers, migrants, etc.);
 - improved capacity within transnational partners demonstrated by improved quality, resources and awareness,
 - improved promotion of dissemination and transfer of innovative results into policy and practice;
 - ability to transfer social innovations between contexts and countries,
 - opportunity to develop a true European mindset and to foster the establishment of formal and informal European networks,
 - improved performance supported by complementary work from transnational partners,
 - for participating organisations - higher profile and credibility, real learning and increased opportunity for direct exchanges of experience and products,
 - increased self-confidence and self-assurance amongst the individuals involved,
- **Transnational co-operation platforms for groupings of Member States** have provided valuable support for policy and practice. For example, the EQUAL Baltic Sea Meeting² brings together EU member states around the Baltic Sea – Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Germany, Denmark, Sweden and Finland. It meets without a fixed agenda and works mostly in groups where representatives of Managing, Paying and Auditing Authorities and National Support Structures have the opportunity to discuss various matters arising in managing EQUAL. Participants have confirmed that this periodic meeting serves as an effective platform for transferring good practice between Member States.
- **Thematic networking between key stakeholders, promoters and funding bodies, as organised under EQUAL,** has shown the value of analysing and consolidating the policy implications of the results of innovative action in different Member States and making them available for the reflections on both the Lisbon targets and the National Reform Programmes. A powerful example has been the EQUAL European Community of Practice on the re-integration of ex-offenders³. This transnational working group, in which seven Member States are participating, has analysed and assessed the approach, context and results of more than 70 EQUAL Partnerships in 19 Member States. The Group of Seven is actively networking with the other 12 Member States through "twinning arrangements". The Group's work has focused on collecting good practice and drawing conclusions for policy and delivery, and identifying what works, and what not, and why.

¹ 'An investment in Europe's present and future: The added value of Transnational Co-operation at project level under EQUAL.' Ruth Santos, ECOTEC, 2005. A synthesis of the conclusions is presented in Annex 2

² Further details are presented in Annex 5

³ Further details are presented in Annex 3

On the basis of the experience of the EQUAL Initiative, the most **important benefits of investments in transnational and inter regional cooperation** can be summarised as follows.

Direct benefits	Indirect and associated benefits
It directly stimulates and supports innovation by encouraging sharing of research and technical and practical techniques and experience.	It reinforces formal and informal sharing of ideas and experience across Member States. Participating organisations are encouraged to reflect more widely on their work, and are better-informed about alternatives and comparable activities.
It is a cost-effective means of validating and passing on learning and experience , avoiding unnecessary duplication of experimental work, and providing a broad basis for benchmarking.	It helps improve communications between national, regional and sectoral groupings, and helps them reinforce their value-for-money measures by developing the new means of comparison and benchmarking . It helps promote common standards and enables products and ideas to be validated more widely and at higher levels.
It helps reinforce a European idea of culture, ideas, ideals and policies, and provides an important European dimension to the pursuit of the Lisbon Agenda.	It contributes to the wider objective of building Europe by providing a setting for cross-cultural debate and exchange.
It provides those participating in it with professional stimulus and connects them with European and international networks .	
It builds the capacity of participating organisations and of regional and national administrations.	It helps reduce risk in social and policy innovation and the development of good practice by providing a context for real-time exchange of information on successes and failures.

2. Possible forms and types of transnational and inter-regional co-operation that could be implemented in the ESF 2007 –2013 programme period (WHAT?)

The ESF Regulation (Art. 3. 6) provides for transnational and inter-regional actions. Experience from past and current transnational cooperation programmes confirms that it is in the interest of all Member States to plan for some element of transnational and inter-regional co-operation in the next ESF programme period. These programming elements could present two important strengths of this approach, and the forms and types of collaboration to be supported:

- a cost-effective procedure for **jointly developing, testing, applying, and disseminating** good practice;
- an opportunity to build networks and partnerships of practical **co-operation, exchange of experience, results, knowledge and know-how, and mutual support** between Member States at all levels, and involving their ESF Managing Authorities.

The main partners for transnational cooperation under EQUAL were projects, operating within a common schedule and under common implementing provisions set by the EQUAL Guidelines. Compared to the 2000-2006 period, **transnational and inter-regional co-operation under the ESF 2007-2013 will have a larger scope both in terms of actors involved, and activities supported**, and be flexible as regards schedules, eligibility rules and management procedures.

Past and present programmes have provided experience of four main types of transnational and inter-regional co-operation. Each of them is exemplified in an annex to this paper with a specific example and the benefits that was obtained in each of them:

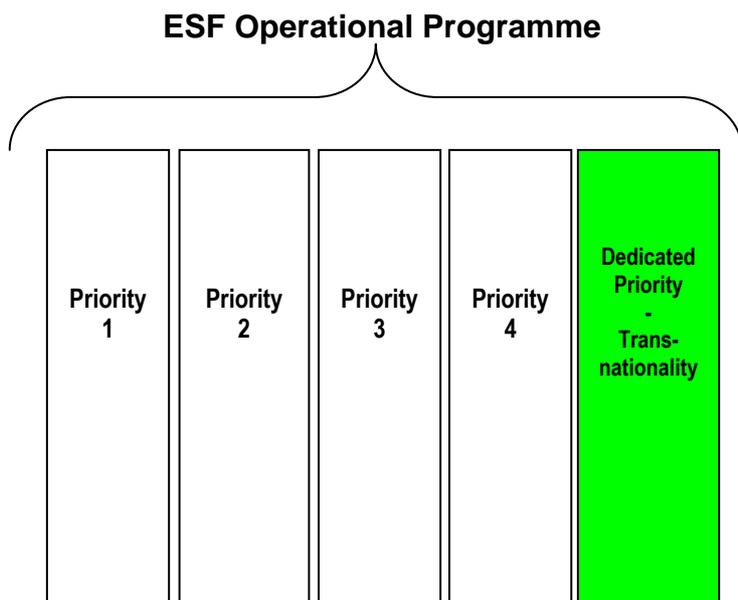
- **cooperation between projects in different Member States**
This type of support is well-known from the EQUAL Initiative, and relates to support for an ESF-funded project in, for example, France which has formally agreed with another project in Germany or other additional countries to collaborate on a number of issues of mutual interest to enhance their own activities and performance, and perhaps produce common results.
For the ESF 2006-2013, this type of support can be provided in a much more flexible way
For a summary of conclusions from the EQUAL experience, see Annex 2.
- **cooperation between national networks focused around a specific issue or problem**
This type of support brings together individual stakeholders or groups of them from different countries or topics with a shared interest, or national groupings and networks with a common affiliation such as social partners to collaborate on matters ranging from information exchange to common activities, products or policies)
For details, see Annex3
- **Cooperation between organisations or area based partnerships**
This type of support includes twinning arrangements between institutions which facilitate providing each other with support in addressing common issues relevant to ESF objectives and priorities. – *For details, see Annexes 4.*
For example, in the capacity building priority, this type of support could be provided for twinning arrangements between Public Administration Colleges, or to set up efficient structures and procedures for cooperation between health or emergency services in cross-border regions.
- **partnerships between national organisations such as Member State ESF Managing Authorities in several MS** (groupings of key experts and actors, like ESF Monitoring Committee members, meeting to share experience on ESF work and lessons learned and thereby help advance the Lisbon process and national agendas and improve coordination between Member States with regard to implementation and other issues
See Annex 5.

3. Implementation at programme level (HOW?)

The ESF 2007 –2013 programmes could accommodate transnational co-operation in two distinct ways each with their benefits and shortcomings. The combination of the two ways could be useful and gives possibility for a wider flexibility in the implementation of transnational and interregional cooperation.

Option A: A dedicated transnational priority, alongside other ESF priorities, inviting Member States to fund projects, networks, twinning arrangements or exchange and mainstreaming activities within a specific funding envelope

Illustration – a dedicated transnational priority



This **dedicated priority** axis could be designed

- to provide funding for any transnational action, i.e. **transnational cooperation on any issue**, of any type and form, and with any partner, or
- to **focus** on a limited number of **policy fields or issues** where Member States expect that learning from others can contribute to an improvement of their national reform efforts. Thematic focus had also been a building block of the EQUAL Programme. It has helped to concentrate resources on priority policy needs for learning and reform, and facilitated exchange of experience across national borders as a critical mass of Member States had chosen the same or similar issues or fields.

In addition to the specification of the scope, Member States should specify the scale of funding under a dedicated priority. The options are:

- to contribute to **the total cost of any operation** that (is going to) incorporate an element of transnational cooperation, or
- concentrate funding on the transnational element or supplements of an operation whereas the related core work which has mainly a national dimension would be financed through other priority axes, or even outside the Operational Programme.

In either case, the **dedicated priority** could be used to include any type of transnational collaboration between agencies, institutions, regions or Member State bodies, and all thematic work. Provisions should be flexible and allow accommodating different models and schedules of integrating the transnational element. For example, provisions could include the transnational element of an operation right from its start, or added later when its advantages become visible.

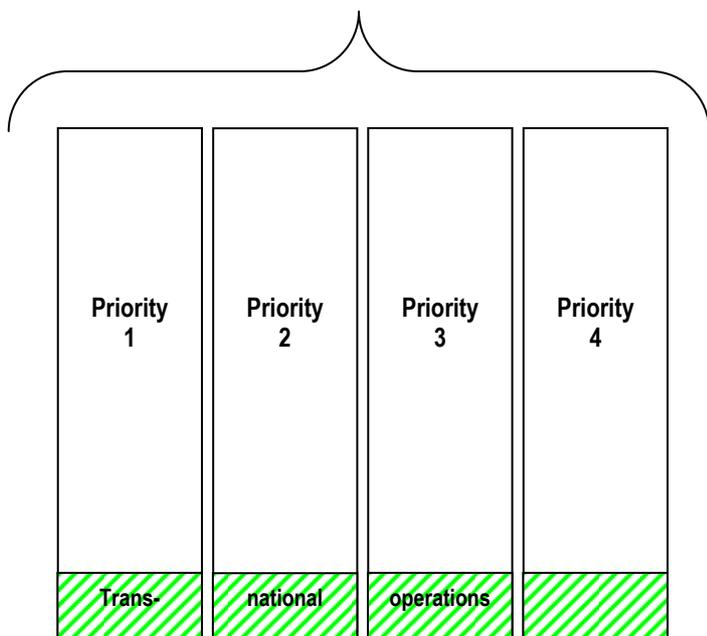
The likely advantages and disadvantages of this option are summarised below.

Advantages	Disadvantages
<p>Allows for more concentrated and coherent actions, and will facilitate management and implementation at programme and project level.</p> <p>It will also confirm the importance of transnational cooperation.</p>	<p>If funding under a dedicated priority is limited to the transnational element, the separation of activities by type (national part in the policy priority axis, transnational part in transnational priority axis) may increase administration and the number of decisions to be taken – one operation or project may need two decisions to complete their work programme.</p>
<p>Ensures that all funding for transnational cooperation is granted under the same conditions, and administered under the same procedures, and monitored & assessed according to a common framework</p>	<p>In order to provide quality support to project promoters, the MS needs to allocate specific resources and time to achieve added value.</p>
<p>Offers the capacity to fund transnational operations sufficiently well to encourage promoters and objectives.</p>	<p>Transnational cooperation is concerned primarily with achieving added value – concentrating this in a single dedicated priority will require clear guidance on the objectives (e.g. whether it should be used for policy development, or for stimulating and promoting good practice and products, or for both) to avoid confusion.</p>
<p>Benefit of a 10% higher intervention rate for transnational activities.</p>	<p>Risks to exclude some project promoters completely from access to transnational work due to separation between national and transnational projects</p>
<p>Allows offering transnational cooperation as an additional element of funding, and of achieving better absorption of funds.</p>	

Option B: Support of transnational and interregional cooperation across selected or all priority axes

Illustration - a cross-cutting approach to transnational and interregional cooperation

ESF Operational Programme



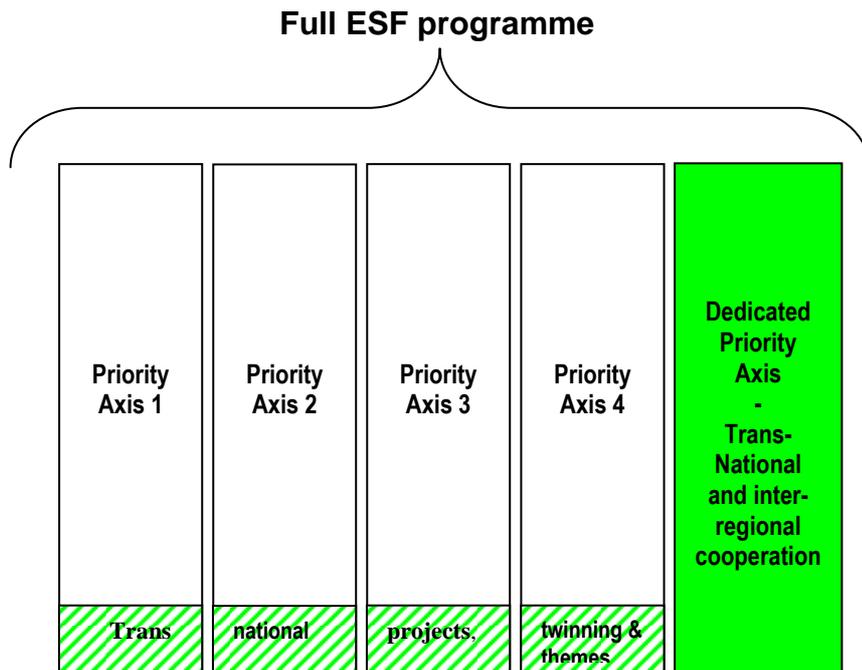
Again, as for the dedicated priority axis option, Member States should specify the eligible scope for funding, i.e. the policy issues and themes for which transnational activities will be supported, as well as the type and form

Advantages	Disadvantages
The opportunity to offer the experience and benefits of transnational co-operation to a higher proportion of operations	The risk that transnational cooperation may be so thinly spread that it eventually disappears altogether – that small budgets will lead to low concentration and low visibility, very little common purpose and difficulties in showing added-value.
No one is excluded whichever priority axis they are in	A risk of poor take-up – it may not get used at all unless it is obligatory.
Offers maximum flexibility to programme implementation.	Complexity of selection, monitoring and evaluation, and – difficulty of showing added value. The MS loses the extra 10% EU financing compared to having a separate priority

There is a **third option**: One can minimise the possible disadvantages of opting either for a dedicated priority or a cross-cutting approach by choosing to combine of each of the two approaches described above into a combination of the A and B options.

Option C: A comprehensive transnational approach, providing the highest degree of flexibility both for Member States and for beneficiaries

Illustration – a comprehensive transnational approach



This comprehensive transnational approach would:

- **include a dedicated priority**, focused on a limited set of policy or practice themes or issues, and at the same time
- **offer the cross-cutting option** of using transnational co-operation to support operations across all relevant ESF priorities. This approach would reduce the disadvantages of the approaches A and B outlined above, and allow maximising the advantages. Therefore it
 - Combines flexibility with the opportunity of an increased intervention rate in a dedicated priority;
 - Offers the opportunity of transnational co-operation to all ESF fields of action;
 - Offers the opportunity to continue to build on all the successful elements of transnational co-operation from previous programmes;
 - Reinforces the principles of collaborative transnational co-operation in the Lisbon process;
 - Continues a process of cooperation, benchmarking and capacity-building that has been of particular benefit to poorer regions and less-experienced Member States;
 - Gives all promoters the possibility of accessing funds for transnational co-operation.

4. Implementation and management at Member State and EU levels (What provisions? WHO? and WHEN?)

Resources and assistance

Whichever combination of the three programme structure options they apply in their programmes, it is up to **Member States to establish the conditions under which transnational co-operation achieves high quality** and contributes to the objectives of the Operational Programme.

Within their own responsibility, Managing Authorities and Implementing Bodies in the Member States should:

- clearly inform potential applicants about possibilities for transnational funding, and motivate them to apply for it;
- create clear guidelines for applicants;
- ensure that the application process is as simple and flexible as possible;
- agree and maintain objectives and activity plans for their work programmes for transnational cooperation;
- provide support to encourage participation from voluntary and community organisations, NGO and social partners;
- help project promoters and key actors ensure that co-operation directly reflects their own needs;
- establish systems to gather examples of good practice;
- monitor projects and disseminate results.

At a European or inter-Member State level, there could be other requirements. They could include:

- developing common monitoring structures and evaluation indicators;
- provision of networks and tools to support partner-search;
- assistance with identifying thematic priorities.
- support in evaluating the impact and value-added of transnational cooperation on projects, partnerships and thematic initiatives;
- support with establishing a framework for the implementation and transfer of results and the dissemination of good practice.

The Commission has made it clear that its role will be supportive. It will therefore be for Member States to make it clear what **help and expert support** they require.

Implementing provisions

Experience of relevant previous and current programmes has shown that potential benefits from supporting transnational cooperation can only be efficiently exploited if clear and simple provisions for some key building blocks have been made. The Group has identified a number of strategic building blocks that are also required for efficient transnational activities in the European Social Fund, in particular:

- a) **Define the issues for transnational activities**, if relevant, and link these to needs, issues and objectives addressed in the programme.

As said before, to focus support on a limited number of policy fields or issues where Member States expect that learning from others can contribute to an improvement of their national reform efforts will help to concentrate resources on priority policy needs for learning and reform, and facilitate exchange of experience with other Member States that have chosen the same or similar issues or fields.

- b) **Ensure effective use of the results of transnational cooperation**

Learning from others to stimulate or underpin reforms needs to be linked to policy agendas and actors. Early involvement of potential users facilitates capitalisation of the results of transnational cooperation. Using sound planning tools such as PCM tested under EQUAL can empower stakeholders to participate at all stages.

- c) **Specify the forms or types of eligible transnational collaboration**

Transnational collaboration in the broad sense defined in the context of the ESF covers a broad spectrum of activities, most of which were used successfully under EQUAL.

Operational Programmes should therefore identify and illustrate the different types of eligible activities that can be funded, such as

- monitoring, studies, surveys of developments in other Member States or countries, including study visits and placements
- assessment, peer reviews, benchmarking of relevant practices and performance in other Member States or countries
- dissemination and sharing of information, experience, good practice and lessons learnt, through e.g. publications, events, networks, twinning arrangements;
- exchange of programme and project managers and staff, trainers, and students, representatives of stakeholders
- import, transfer, and adaptation of tools and practices from abroad
- joint or coordinated development, testing or validation of services, products or support systems
- coordinated joint action
- sharing experience on the ground

d) Capacity building and provision of professional guidance

Transnational cooperation is by definition not a standard activity and does not follow a standard procedure. In the fields of labour market, social inclusion and human resource development policies and delivery, transnational actions may need to tackle complex issues and may involve a number of actors. In order to be successful, transnational actions need to be based on a sound analysis, apply a robust methodology for validating results, and implement an effective strategy for communicating the lessons learnt to stakeholders and potential users.

Therefore the support and management of transnational activities actions takes more time and requires more resources for planning, management, evaluation and mainstreaming than routine activities. Member States need to be prepared to allocate appropriate technical assistance resources for this purpose.

The EQUAL experience has shown that the availability of professional programme support services has a decisive impact on the quality of transnational work actions and on its results. It has also shown, however, that in many Member States professional capacities are not easily available and therefore need to be further developed and maintained.

On the practical level, transnational cooperation - in particular between projects - gives rise to a lot of questions; How to find partners, how to share the work between partners, how to share the costs, how to monitor and evaluate transnational projects etc.

Many of the answers to these and other questions have been presented in the [EQUAL Guide on Transnational Co-operation](#)⁴. Though targeted to EQUAL projects, many of the recommendations, such as on cost sharing agreements, overcoming cultural differences and monitoring, are generally applicable and can thus be used for any kind of transnational co-operation between projects. Managing Authorities can use this guide or on the basis of the guide draw up their own guide targeted to the national conditions.

e) Ensure monitoring and assessment of achievements including agreed indicators

As the EQUAL experience has shown, an on-going monitoring and evaluation can support sound implementation and management of transnational activities by helping to assess the added value of the transnational cooperation, and contributing to the validation and dissemination of good practice. The Logical Framework Approach adapted for EQUAL can also be a useful tool for monitoring and evaluation.⁵

⁴ http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/equal/about/key-doc_en.cfm

⁵ The **EQUAL Partnership Development Toolkit**⁵ – a practical guide to participative planning, monitoring and evaluation for facilitators of EQUAL Development and Transnational Partnerships- provides tools both for identifying innovation issues, for presenting these and their inter-relationships, for linking innovative results with user needs, and for organising these processes in an interactive way with stakeholders. It can be downloaded from the EQUAL Website: http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/equal/data/document/pdtoolkit_en.pdf

Conclusions

The objective of supporting transnational and inter-regional collaboration in the 2007 – 2013 programming period is to contribute to economic and social cohesion by learning how to improve strategy and delivery of national, regional and local policies supported by the ESF.

Experience from previous programmes has confirmed that, if this is well planned and executed, it underpins national reform agendas by

- contributing to innovation,
- playing an important part in identifying good practice, effective policy strategies and delivery systems, and
- disseminating and transferring working examples in a cost- and time-effective manner.

The approach for designing support should be to allow for the widest range of transnational collaboration.

Implementing provisions should enable Member States and individual actions to opt for structures and activities best suited to adding quality and value to what they are doing.

Each Operational Programme should specify the type, scope and form of transnational and interregional co-operation it wishes to support

This will require sound ex-ante evaluation, based on experience of the 2000-2006 period, to assess which combinations of support dimensions best serve the policy needs and contribute to effectively sharing of information, experiences, results and good practices, and developing complementary approaches and coordinated or joint action

Five common requirements lie behind these arrangements.

- Member States should take and communicate clear decisions on the activities they propose to make eligible.
- To relate individual project results to policies, Member States should agree to collaborate to create thematic clusters based on Lisbon guidelines.
- An easily-accessible platform should be available for partner-search and matching.
- Approval of transnational priorities in ESF should rest with the Managing Authority whose budget is being used - in case of shared obligations between projects or other partners, coordination between managing authorities will be needed.
- Each Member State should be responsible for the documentation and monitoring of transnational work of, but there should be provision for joint evaluation of partnerships and activities.

ANNEX 1 – Self-Assessment Checklists

The following checklists have been developed to facilitate a robust assessment of how well transnational and interregional cooperation⁶ is integrated into a new ESF programme. Following the programming procedure and the requirement to establish coherent programming documents, three checklists are provided:

- ↳ the first on ex-ante evaluation,
- ↳ the second for the National Strategic Reference Framework, and
- ↳ the third for Operational Programmes.

The checklists should not be considered as exhaustive. The analysis of every specific situation may lead to the integration of further points.

The checklists have been elaborated by a working group of Member States and reflect the opinion of this working group. Where they go beyond regulatory obligations, the working group took account of standards of good practice and therefore considered their application appropriate to ensure effective integration of transnational and interregional cooperation into new ESF programmes.

- **Check list on ex-ante evaluation**

The issues addressed refer to the Commission's Draft Evaluation Working Paper for the New Programming Period, 2007-2013 on Ex Ante Evaluation⁷.

- **Check-list on transnational and interregional cooperation in the National Strategic Reference Framework**

According to Art 26.2 of the General Provisions Regulation of Structural Funds, the National Strategic Reference Framework (NSRF) constitutes a reference instrument for preparing the Programming of Structural Funds.

The check-list below refers to different articles on the NSRF in the general provisions Regulation of Structural Funds.

- **Check-list on transnational and interregional cooperation in the Programming (ex-ante evaluation and Operational Programmes)**

Art. 3.6 of the new ESF Regulation stipulates that the ESF shall also support trans-national and inter-regional actions in particular through sharing of information, experiences, results and good practices, and through developing complementary approaches and coordinated or joint action. The check-list below refers to different articles in Titles III (Programming) and IV (Efficiency) of the general provisions Regulation of Structural Funds.

⁶ To simplify matters, the notion of "transnational cooperation" also covers "interregional cooperation" as defined on page 4 of this note

⁷ http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docoffic/working/doc/exante_sf2007-2013_en.pdf

Checklist for ex-ante evaluation

	Suggested information to be included in the ex-ante evaluation
Socio-economic analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessment of the outcomes of transnational and interregional cooperation in 2000-2006 programmes (in particular EQUAL) and what lessons can be applied to the new programme.
Assessment of the rationale of the strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessment of the potential added value of transnational and interregional cooperation • Assessment of how transnational and interregional cooperation will be integrated into the programme
Coherence of the strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Description of how transnational and interregional cooperation will contribute to achieving the objectives for employment and social inclusion in the National Reform Programme. • Relevance of proposed indicators

Checklist for the National Strategic Reference Framework

	Suggested information to be included in the National Strategic Reference Framework
Socio-economic analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SWOT analysis covers transnational cooperation
Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Description of how transnational cooperation will contribute to the strategic objectives of the NSRF (overall vision, relevance) • Short description of the main elements of the support for transnational cooperation (objectives, focus, use, types, and capacity) where a dedicated priority axis is envisaged

Note: As regards "earmarking", the envisaged contribution to transnational and interregional cooperation could be attributed to the earmarking category "Mobilisation for reforms in the fields of employment and inclusion"

Checklist for an Operational Programme

	Suggested information to be included in Operational Programmes
Programme analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SWOT analysis covers transnational cooperation • Description of how the selected themes (if applicable) for transnational cooperation takes account of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The main lessons learned from EQUAL and other ESF evaluations (2000-2006) ○ the findings of the ex-ante evaluation as regards the potential for transnational cooperation • justification of the selected themes and issues in terms of links /consistency with the overall socio-economic analysis and with the national reform agenda • main needs of social partners relating to capacity building in the field of transnational cooperation (for convergence objective)
Programme strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Description of the strategy for the promotion of transnational and interregional cooperation (overall vision, relevance, specific objectives, focus, use, types, and support capacity; expected contribution to the Operational Programme's strategic objectives) • Description of how transnational cooperation will be implemented (cross cutting approach; a dedicated priority axis, or a combined approach) • Description of coordination structures and procedures within the programme and with other Structural Fund interventions - in particular other interregional and transnational interventions – and with other transnational programmes in the field of education and training. • indicative breakdown by Lisbon categories Note: the envisaged contribution to transnational and interregional cooperation could be attributed to "Mobilisation for reforms in the fields of employment and inclusion"
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Description of how transnational cooperation will contribute to the specific objectives of each priority axis (where appropriate) • Description of the target areas/themes, users and beneficiaries identified for transnational cooperation in each priority axis (where appropriate) and what flexibilities will be available to cater for new and emerging themes • List of indicative operations (forms and types of eligible activities) • Definition of specific objectives and identification of sound output and impact indicators (in case of a dedicated priority axis) • Description of how Technical Assistance resources will be used to support transnational activity (nature of support services envisaged; level of resources made available; management arrangements planned) Note: this may be described under a separate Technical Assistance priority
Implementing provisions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the mechanisms for ensuring that the funding of transnational activity will be maintained throughout the life of the OP? • How will simple, flexible and effective management structures and eligibility rules be ensured at programme and beneficiary level? • How will transparency on actual and potential transnational partners and their activities be established (e.g. for partner search)? • How will flexible cooperation and sound financial management (in particular with regard to arrangements for cost sharing) with other Member States be ensured? • How will it be ensured that transnational activities deliver results (will the use of established project planning tools be required/recommended/supported)? • How will MA/NSS arrange themselves to make sure that the above mentioned provisions are well handled, e.g. by establishing a contact point with resources dedicated to transnational cooperation?

Annex: 2

An investment in Europe's present and future: The added value of Transnational Co-operation at project level under EQUAL Summary of Conclusions of a Survey⁸

Transnational co-operation is an essential element of EQUAL for promoting the transfer of knowledge and good practice between Development Partnerships (DPs) and between participating countries. By sharing the results of innovative activities carried out by DPs at national level, transnational co-operation can provide real added value for policy development at the national and European level. EQUAL emphasises cooperation between Member States to share positive and effective results across Europe.

The successful experiences under EQUAL clearly illustrate in which ways transnational co-operation has added value to the work of the "domestic" projects and provided sustainable results.

Learning from and about the differences

Transnational work has enabled the identification of solutions that are applicable in different contexts and countries.

The transnational activities undertaken have demonstrated the benefits of being able to compare and learn from experiences across Member States. The challenges are similar but the context in each Member State varies. Transnational co-operation provides the opportunity to identify, develop and test innovative solutions that are applicable in different contexts and countries.

Developing a true European mindset

Transnational co-operation fostered the establishment of formal and informal European networks. The creation of networks improved communication between partners and actors (projects, Member States, etc.) and increased their commitment and understanding of the problems faced. Participating in European networks and building contacts in other Member States open up opportunities for future co-operation and sustainable collaboration, while adding a European dimension to a project's work programme.

Using European diversity to strengthen the impact of the "national" Development Partnerships (DPs)

Transnational co-operation increased the potential impact of the "national" DPs at local, regional and national levels. It has also built capacity within the organisations by improving the quality, resources and awareness of the organisations involved.

The reinforcement and credibility achieved through involving actors from other countries and participating in transnational activities had an impact on DP organisations. Working transnationally gave a higher profile to the organisations involved in the eyes of fellow practitioners and policy makers, giving greater visibility and weight to the activities carried out at national level.

Fostering individual and collective empowerment

Transnational activities had an impact of increasing self-confidence and self-assurance of the individuals involved, and of making participants aware of "belonging to a large European family".

⁸ 'An investment in Europe's present and future: The added value of Transnational Co-operation at project level under EQUAL.' Ruth Santos, ECOTEC, 2005.

It is only through these transnational activities and exchanges that Europe can really be constructed at ground level. In general it was important for all the participants to realise that they were not alone on working on the different topics and issues, and that there were people in other parts of Europe fighting the same battles as them. It also improved their personal experience, language and communication skills.

The transnational activities were very important to promote empowerment, self-esteem and recognition of the difficulties that the beneficiaries, across the different countries, face. Being invited to participate in transnational activities made the beneficiaries feel important and valued, giving them a confidence boost.

Raising awareness

Transnational work allowed partners to gain a better understanding of different national contexts, relevant EU developments and to raise awareness of the discrimination faced by certain groups such as asylum seekers and migrants.

Making change possible

Transnational work has promoted the dissemination and transfer of results into policy and practice providing the opportunity for DPs to influence the policy agenda by looking at issues from a new perspective.

Making a difference through transnational co-operation

EQUAL represents a significant investment in Europe's future, by combating discrimination and inequality in the labour market. Integrating people who are at a disadvantage in the labour market is important in preventing social exclusion, raising employment rates, and providing for the sustainability of social protection systems.

However, European and national strategies cannot succeed without action, commitment and involvement by people on the ground. The scale and range of transnational activity in EQUAL exemplifies what really can be achieved when partnerships across Europe work together successfully and use European diversity to strengthen their domestic activities. Across all the Member States, working with partners in other countries continues to offer the opportunity to exchange expertise and develop new approaches, thereby adding value to national initiatives.

Annex 3

EQUAL: TRANSNATIONAL COOPERATION – EUROPEAN COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE on the Re-Integration of Ex-Offenders

Great Britain and Germany have been leading thematic work on development and testing of innovative approaches to the re-integration of offenders.

This was identified as an important European-wide issue during Round 1 of the EQUAL programme. There were 26 Development Partnerships (DPs), from 12 Member States, working together in six Transnational Cooperation Agreements (TCAs). The European Thematic Group (ETG) on Employability suggested this would be a fruitful issue to explore in the future work programme.

This proposal was well-founded because the topic is even more strongly represented in the second round which began in the second half of 2004. In Round 2 there are 52 Development Partnerships (DPs), from 19 countries focussing primarily or exclusively on offenders. These DPs are cooperating within 14 TCAs. Significantly, these partnerships involve the institutions and/or authorities from their national criminal justice systems.

Great Britain and Germany invited other countries to join them in exploring the issue and organised an initial meeting in Berlin in October 2005. Representatives from Managing Authorities, National Support Structures and individual DPs in 7 Member States took part.

This meeting heard about an initial analysis of the TCAs and agreed a provisional work programme and objectives for the next 2 years. This will include 2 major events in 2006 and establishing a European platform in 2007 for sustaining the outcomes after EQUAL has come to an end. The seven countries also agreed 'twinning' arrangements to engage the 12 other countries with offender DPs in the development and implementation of the work programme.

The initial analysis of the transnational work programmes has identified two primary issues that DPs are addressing:

- Improving arrangements for the transition of offenders from the penal system to the world of work, particularly the attainment of relevant labour market skills;
- Engaging with employers to open up employment opportunities.

A meeting in January, involving representatives from the Steering Group and other countries agreed arrangements for an Exchange Event to be held in Portugal. This meeting will involve Development Partnerships from both rounds of the programme and will identify priority issues to be addressed in a subsequent Policy Forum and the most effective way to present them.

The Policy Forum will be held in Great Britain. Policy makers from Member States will hear about lessons and good practice emerging from EQUAL and will be invited to help in taking forward the most significant developments.

The Steering Group is keen to ensure that the EQUAL Offenders Community of Practice complements other initiatives on the issue. To this end they have already attended the European Offender Employment Forum (EOEF) conference in Prague and are looking for opportunities to make other links for sustainable mainstream activities at national and European levels.

Annex 4

Positive experience gained by Twinning - and how the Czech ESF Managing Authority intends to use it in implementation of transnational cooperation in the ESF Programmes 2007 - 2013

Twinning?

- Twinning was a special instrument of institutional building financed under the PHARE programme. Its aim was targeted administrative cooperation between Member States and Candidate Countries designed to help Candidate Countries strengthen their administrative and judicial capacity to implement Community legislation and to prepare institutions for enlargement.

Added value

- Twinning has resulted in valuable transfer of knowledge, good practice, experience, expertise and lessons learnt from Member States to Candidate Countries.

Specifics of twinning projects

- The duration of this project was at least 18 months.
- An expert was assigned as a long-term pre-accession advisor to manage the activities of the project from the premises of the beneficiary institution in Candidate Country.
- Projects were given specific targets and were required to achieve them.
- The beneficiary country was required to make a commitment that the results of the project would be implemented.
- The purpose was not to replicate any particular system from one or another Member State, but rather to strive to help introduce EU-wide good practice.

Participants

- Ministries and other state institutions

Tools

- Seminars, workshops, study visits, conferences, ad hoc help from the long- or short term experts in the form of advice with drafting manuals and procedures etc.

Possible means of implementation

- Projects should be selected via a bidding process
- Projects should have clearly defined measurable results
- Projects should be closely monitored
- Selection of partners from other countries – via Transnational platform or a database created / managed by the Commission or a Member State alone or in a network.
- Substance of these projects should link to ESF scope of assistance

Possible participants

- Institutions involved in implementation of ESF – Managing Authority, Intermediate Body, Final Beneficiary, Certifying Authority, Audit Authority
- Others – labour offices, regions, NGOs, social partners, research institutions

Possible tools

- Seminars, workshops, study visits, policy forums, conferences, assignments of short term experts etc.

Possible topics

- Problems encountered during implementation of ESF – on the spot checks, publicity, evaluation, aggregation of indicators, involvement of social partners, selection and appraisal of projects, effective financial flows etc.
- Other issues related to ESF or labour market – gender mainstreaming, social inclusion of specific minorities, special ALM policies etc.

Annex 5

EQUAL BALTIC SEA MEETINGS

The EQUAL Baltic Sea Meeting is an annual meeting for all EQUAL officers around the Baltic Sea. Baltic Sea Meeting is continuation for ESF Nordic Meetings from the times of Adapt and Employment initiatives. The first meeting took place in Stockholm in May 2004 as a result of Swedish initiative to invite colleagues from neighbouring EU and then EU accession countries to discuss current issues of EQUAL. In 2005 the Baltic Sea Meeting was held in Helsinki, Finland. All EU member states around the Baltic Sea – Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Germany, Denmark, Sweden and Finland – accepted the invitation and participated the meeting.

The core idea of Baltic Sea Meeting is to gather together without fixed agenda and thus allow the participants to discuss matters they find most important from their points of view. After a short plenary most of the work is done in small groups, where representatives of Managing, Paying and Auditing Authorities and NSS' have the opportunity to discuss various matters arising in EQUAL.

Participants of Baltic Sea Meetings have experienced the meetings beneficial. Due to the principle that there is no fixed agenda, every participant has possibility to raise questions of his/her interest and get instant feedback from colleagues. Need for exchange of experiences between member states was the most important reason for launching Baltic Sea Meetings. It has become obvious that most of member states face the same challenges and by learning from other's experiences each member state do not need to re-invent the same things or make the same mistakes again. In this way, the Baltic Sea Meeting serves as a platform for transferring best practises from one member state to another.

EQUAL is a transnational programme and it is implemented in all EU member states. In this respect the Baltic Sea Meeting has played an important role as a tool for open coordination of programme between participating member states. In the last BSM meeting a great number of discussions dealt with open coordination: timetables, financial questions, future of transnational co-operation etc. in different member states. Respectively, in 2004 in Stockholm the participants discussed about matters concerning launching of second round.

In addition to EQUAL Baltic Sea Meeting the Nordic ESF Objective 3 officers gather annually together to discuss similar topics in Objective 3 programme. Together these meetings prove that there is great demand for transnational co-operation as well as for exchange of information and transfer of good practises from one member state to another now and also in the forthcoming programming period.

Annex 6

EQUAL TRANSNATIONALITY WORKING GROUP

The process of sharing information and learning from one another is at the heart of EQUAL. With this in mind and due to a need for coordination, a group of Member States, with the support of the Commission, set up a Working group on Transnationality with the aim of improving the overall quality and impact of transnational co-operation in the implementation of EQUAL.

A positive result of the work of this group has been a more co-operative and coherent approval process for Transnational Cooperation Agreements especially during Round 2 of EQUAL. The group has acted as:

- a forum for reflection and discussion on planning and implementation issues with regards to the transnational dimension of EQUAL, focusing on collaboration between Development Partnerships and National Support Structures,
- a reference point for National Support Structures and Development Partnerships to which practical questions of general interest are being addressed.

To this end, the Working Group has:

- identified main problems in transnational co-operation, as well as best practice experience;
- revised the guide produced for Round one, and developed a Handbook for Managing Authorities and National Support Structures;
- collected, screened and assessed documents and other working material already developed by the National Support Structures (transnational co-operation agreements, project reports, evaluation reports etc) that have been used for the guide;
- organised a seminar on transnational co-operation - the Transnational Support Seminar which took place in Barcelona on 4/5 March 2004;
- provided training and mentoring on transnationality issues to enable New Member States (and new staff from existing Member States) to gain a general understanding and appreciation of transnational co-operation in EQUAL ;
- created a network of Transnational Co-ordinators (Managing Authorities and National Support Structures) to improve the quality of transnational co-operation in Round 2.

The Transnationality Working Group comprises experts from several Member States (Austria, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Poland, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and United Kingdom) and the European Commission representatives from DG EMPL Unit B4.